

Oregon

High pesticide level prompts pot recall

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Oregon issued a recall for cannabis buds sold at a Mapleton, Ore., retailer after testing showed it had a higher level of a pesticide than the state standard. The cannabis pictured was on display at a February industry conference in Portland.

of the complications that accompany the legalization of recreational cannabis. Growers, like all other agricultural producers, now face a regulatory structure they may not

have dealt with before. Pesticide use has been particularly thorny, because the federal government still considers cannabis illegal and has not established allowable

tolerances of pesticides in pot. As a result, states that have legalized cannabis are figuring it out themselves. Oregon tests cannabis for 59 active ingredients.

"It's a big struggle, for sure," said Sunny Jones, cannabis policy coordinator for the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

The Oregon Health Authority oversees medical marijuana, OLCC oversees recreational marijuana, and ODA regulates aspects that range from food safety regarding cannabis edibles to pesticides, water quality issues and commercial scales used to weigh the product. The recalled pot was grown by Emerald Wave Estate, based in Creswell, Ore., and sold at Buds 4 U in Mapleton, a small town west of Eugene. The OLCC said people who bought the pot

should dispose of it or return it to the retailer.

Mark Pettinger, spokesman for OLCC, said the retailer has fully cooperated in the recall. It sold 82.5 grams of Blue Magoo to 31 customers from March 8 through March 10. The store noticed the failed pesticide reading in the state's Cannabis Tracking System on March 10 and immediately notified OLCC, Pettinger said.

"The retailer was great," he said. "They get the gold star."

Pesticide application would have been done at the grower level, which is the province of ODA. Pettinger said the distribution system breakdown occurred when a wholesaler, Cascade Cannabis Distributing, of Eugene, shipped the pot to the Mapleton store before pesticide test results were entered in the

state's tracking system. The testing was done by Green-Haus Analytical Labs, of Portland, which is certified by the state to test cannabis for potency, water content and pesticide residue.

The mistake might qualify as a violation under Oregon administrative rules, Pettinger said. Failure to keep proper records is a Class III violation; the first offense is punishable by up to 10 days of business closure and a \$1,650 fine. Four violations within a two-year period can lead to license revocation.

The rest of the grower's nine-pound batch of Blue Magoo marijuana flower has been placed on administrative hold, meaning it cannot be lawfully sold pending the outcome of additional pesticide testing. Pettinger said the pot is in the grower's possession.

Producers transitioning to organic say they need help to succeed

By ERIC MORTENSON
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It's one of the conundrums of U.S. agriculture. Demand for organic products continues to surge — sales grew by 11 percent in 2015 — but production is flat.

Researchers at Oregon State University and at Oregon Tilth, which certifies organic producers, tried to find out why.

Glimmers of answers came in a survey returned by 615 farmers nationally. Among other things, they identified obstacles that are holding back organic production. Chief among them, many said they would welcome farmer-to-farmer help, need help with weed and pest management and believe the cost of certification and required paperwork are major obstacles.

Farmers transitioning to organic said they would welcome mentoring from experienced producers and one-on-one technical help. Surprisingly, "yield drag" — reduced crop production from fields that no longer are treated with synthetic pesticides or fertilizers —

was not an issue with survey respondents. Only 17 percent listed it as a major obstacle; 32 percent said it was a minor obstacle and 51 percent said it was not an obstacle at all.

Beyond technical issues, organic producers have passion on their side.

In the survey, 91 percent of respondents said organic production fits their personal or family values and nearly 87 percent it matches up with their environmental concern. More than 86 percent said organic production enhances farm sustainability and coincides with their concerns about human health.

"It's an interesting marketplace thing," said Garry Stephenson, director of Oregon State University's Center for Small Farms & Communi-

Online
The report, "Breaking New Ground: Farmer Perspectives on Organic Transition"
<https://tilth.org/resources/breakingground/>

ty Food Systems. "Demand for certified organic products has continued to grow in the U.S., and yet the businesses involved are having a problem sourcing organic crops — food, cotton, or whatever. For some reason, U.S. farmers are not responding to the demands of the marketplace."

Stephenson said the report may shape the university's approach to transitioning farmers.

"There has not been an organized OSU initiative to educate farmers on transitioning to organic certification," he said by email. "Hopefully, this report may have some influence."

Sarah Brown, education director for Oregon Tilth, said the certification agency is developing a mentorship program that will match beginners with producers who have successfully transitioned

to organic. The survey results also provide justification for weed management research, she agreed.

Stephenson, of OSU, said the consistent identification of weed management as a major obstacle will motivate the university to adjust the focus of some of its programming and applied research. OSU is researching innovative "degree day" modeling as a weed management approach for

vegetable crops, he said. "The challenge of weed management in organic farming is not surprising and other studies have similar findings," Stephenson said by email.

Surveys were sent to farmers who had taken part in Natural Resources Conservation Service's organic programs. The majority who responded were small-scale vegetable farmers with less than 10 years experience.

Stephenson said the data gave researchers access to producers they don't often talk to: farmers who are in the process of transitioning. Researchers broke respondents into four groups: Those who have transitioned; those who have started but not finished; those whose operations are split between conventional and organic; and those who began the organic certification process but quit.

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